

Jacob & Esau

Esau Sells the Birthright

The only real account we have of their youth centered first on the fact that Esau was a hunter and an outdoorsman while Jacob like to remain in the tent and was a mild man. The only reference we have to his mildness is in his cooking a red stew.

So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. 29 Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. 30 And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary." Therefore his name was called Edom. Gen 25:27-30

The details are simple, Esau is hungry, Jacob has the food to satisfy the hunger. Instead of simply giving it to him, Jacob uses this occasion to tempt Esau to give up his birthright. It manifests a lack of faith on his part since God had already promised the elder would serve the younger, but like Sarah with Hagar, it appears that Jacob was going to take matters into his own hands.

But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." 32 And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?" 33 Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day." So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. Gen 25:31-34

Esau's conduct in all this manifested a complete lack of concern for the spiritual aspects of this birthright. Later the Spirit would reveal that this showed his profane and worldly character.

looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. Heb 12:15-17

Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing

There are four characters in this unfolding drama. In these events, character flaws are seen in all of them. Perhaps the least guilty is Isaac who, beginning to feel the affects of old age, began to move toward the future. He wants to have his affairs settled. There are so many things that we can't answer here. Did Isaac know Esau had sold his birthright. Did he know the prophecy given about the children at birth? Scripture does not reveal any of these things. But it does reveal that Jacob was manifesting his faith in the promise God had given when he did these things.

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. Heb 11:20

Rebekah's and Jacob's characters are shown in a very negative light. They are both guilty of blatant deception even to the point of invoking God. Esau's decision to kill Jacob also reflects his ungodly and worldly attitude.

The event begins with the request from Isaac for Esau to bring him some food that would lift up his soul and lead him to give a blessing.

Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death. 3 Now therefore, please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. 4 And make me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die." Gen 27:2-4

Rebekah overheard the conversation and decided to intervene in behalf of her favored son Jacob. But she brings him into the scheme from the beginning. He is to get two choice kids, knowing that he would be taking it to his father and deceiving him into getting the blessing.

Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt game and to bring it. 6 So Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, "Indeed I heard your father speak to Esau your brother, saying, 7 'Bring me game and make savory food for me, that I may eat it and bless you in the presence of the Lord before my death.' 8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. 9 Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. 10 Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death." Gen 27:5-10

It appears that Jacob's only objection to the plan is the worldly sorrow of getting caught. God lays out the facts and leave us to draw the conclusions.

And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. 12 Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing." 13 But his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me." Gen 27:11-14

With the food made, the second part of the deception is to make Isaac believe that Jacob is Esau. To accomplish this, Jacob is decked out in an outlandish costume. First, Esau's clothes are brought and Jacob puts them on. Rebekah then cuts up the skins of the young goats she had made into the food and places them on Jacobs hands/forearms and neck. So Jacob enters into the presence of his father with food he did not cook, clothing that was not his and the skins of animals strategically placed.

And he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and his mother made savory food, such as his father loved. 15 Then Rebekah took the choice clothes of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. 16 And she put the skins of the kids of the goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. 17 Then she gave the savory food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. Gen 27:14-17

The way of the transgressor is hard. (Pr. 13:15)

Nothing about this deception goes easy and Jacob is forced to repeatedly lie.

1. He is directly asked if he is Esau and he had to answer in the affirmative.
2. He is asked how he got the game so quickly and affirms that God helped him.
3. He is asked to come near and be examined whether he was really Esau or not.
4. He is asked again are you really my son Esau.

So he went to his father and said, "My father." And he said, "Here I am. Who are you, my son?" 19 Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn; I have done just as you told me; please arise, sit and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me." 20 But Isaac said to his son, "How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" And he said, "Because the Lord your God brought it to me." 21 Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." 22 So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau." 23 And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. 24 Then he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He said, "I am." Gen 27:18-24

Most people with a tender conscience would have been overwhelmed at some point by so many questions, but Jacob hardens his heart and carries out the deception to the bitter end and receives the blessing. The pressure of Esau's imminent return must have also weight heavy on his mind since as soon as he was done, Esau returned.

Isaac's Blessing

After reading through the blessing it is clear that Isaac intended to make Esau the sole beneficiary of both God's covenant blessings and his own possessions. Later when Esau asked if anything had been reserved for him, it is clear that Isaac had left nothing for Jacob.

Therefore may God give you Of the dew of heaven, Of the fatness of the earth, And plenty of grain and wine. 29 Let peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, And let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, And blessed be those who bless you!" ... 37 Then Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you, my son?" Gen 27:28-29, 37

Esau's Bitter Despair and Terrible Decision

As noted above, Jacob made his escape in the nick of time.

Now it happened, as soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. Gen 27:30-31

After catching the game and preparing it himself he brings it to his now full and satisfied father. He triumphantly announced his presence and success and eagerly awaits his father's proud and excited response. How his heart fell as he heard his father's bitter response.

And his father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" So he said, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau." 33 Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, "Who? Where is the one who hunted game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came, and I have blessed him — and indeed he shall be blessed." Gen 27:32-33

As Esau heard the terrible truth, his heart falls into despair and he sought to receive whatever was left.

When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me — me also, O my father!" 35 But he said, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." ... 38 And Esau said to his father, "Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me — me also, O my father!" And Esau lifted up his voice and wept Gen 27:34-35, 38

But, Isaac now reaped as he had sown. Just as he had sought to take away everything from Jacob, he now had nothing left to give Esau. Hearing the meager blessing, Esau's bitterness turned to hatred and the decision to murder and thus regain what he had lost.

So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob." Gen 27:41

Rebekah sends Jacob to Laban

When Rebekah hears of Esau's plans, several ideas come into her mind. First, that given time Esau would forget his anger and so the best solution was to send Jacob away for a time. With the terrible attitudes and morals of Esau's wives, that made her life so bitter, she wanted to find a wife for Jacob who would better accord with her own.

When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah. Gen 26:34-35

And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" Gen 27:46

Jacob Gains Wives, Children and Flocks(Gen. 28-33)

Jacob Makes a Vow(Gen 28:10-22)

On his way to Haran, he stopped at Bethel for the night. This was near where Abraham had camped after his arrival in Canaan and he built an altar there(Gen. 12:8; 13:3). God revealed His work on earth in a dream with a ladder and angels moving up and down on it. Then the Lord appeared to him above the ladder and renewed the covenant promise with Jacob. It is very probable that Jacob had repented of his lies since God spoke in this manner. He promised to care for Jacob no matter where he travels and bring him back safely. After Jacob awoke, he used the stone he had slept on as a pillar and poured out oil upon it to consecrate it. He then made a vow to make a house for God in Bethel and to give a tenth of all he gained on his journey to God, thus following Abraham's example with Melchizedek(Gen. 14:20).

Jacob Arrives in Haran and Serves 14 years(Gen. 29:1-35)

The similarity of the events between Abraham's servant choosing Rebekah and Jacob's arrival and meeting Rachel are strikingly similar. For he meets Rachel at the well on the first day of his arrival. As soon as Rachel knows who he is she runs to get Laban, who hurries to meet Jacob and bring him into his home. After a month of service, Laban offers to pay Jacob whatever wages he chooses and Jacob asked for Rachel.

The pronunciation of their names is given in two distinct ways. Rachel(raw-khale' or ραχηλ and Leah (lay-aw' or Lee-aah). Either pronunciation is acceptable, although we are accustomed to the latter.

After seven years Laban deceived Jacob giving him Leah instead of Rachael. After awakening he finds he is next to Leah instead of Rachel. One has to wonder if he ever saw the similarity between what he had done to his own father. But certainly "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*" (Gal. 6:7). Instead of an apology, Laban makes light of it and demands another seven years of labor in order to then earn the right to Rachel.

Another very unhappy home is established when Jacob shows blatant favoritism to Rachel over Leah. God took note of it and blessed Leah with four boys in succession. Rachel cannot have children so she gives her servant Bilhah and she conceives two boys. Leah then gives her servant Zilpah who also has two boys. Leah then had a fifth son and a sixth and his only daughter. Finally Rachel has a son and on the journey back to Canaan dies in childbirth with her final son.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23 the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun; 24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; 5 the sons of Bilhah Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; 26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram. Gen. 35:22-26

| Leah | Rachel | Bilhah,(Rachel's servant) | Zilpah(Leah's servant) |
|------------------|---------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Reuben, Judah, | Joseph | Dan | Gad |
| Simeon, Issachar | Benjamin | Naphtali | Asher |
| Levi, Zebulun | | | |

After the birth of these children Jacob determines to leave but Laban offers to give him some livestock if he will serve him for another seven years. Laban has noted that Jacob has-brought great riches to him.

And Laban said to him, "Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake." 28 Then he said, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." 29 So Jacob said to him, "You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me. 30 For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; the Lord has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?" Gen. 30:27-30

The agreement they strike involved the colors of the animals. It began with the solid colored goats going to Laban and the speckled and spotted going to Jacob and the white sheep going to Laban and the brown to Jacob.

And Jacob said "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me I will again feed and keep your flocks: 32 Let me pass through all your flock today removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and these shall be my wages. Gen. 30:31-33

Although this is how it began Jacob complained bitterly at the end of Laban's changes.

Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. 8 If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. Gen. 31:7-8

Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night." Gen. 31:4-42

The events describing Jacob's use of rods has created speculation as to its power. While the older commentaries suggest there was some power to this later ones consider it as an idea that had no real power. The truth is that God did this for Jacob and even he admitted it later. He may have learned as Balaam did that if he just left it to God it would all be resolved in his favor anyway.

If he said thus: The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. 9 So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. Gen. 31:8

Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said 'Here I am.' 12 And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed the pillar and where you made a vow to Me. Now arise, get out of this land, and return to the land of your family.'" Gen. 31:11-13

Jacob Returned to Canaan(Gen. 31:1-55)

After it became evident God was going to bless Jacob regardless of the type of sheep they agreed upon, Laban's sons became bitter and jealous and God revealed to Jacob it was time to leave.

Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth." 2 And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. 3 Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." Gen. 31:1-3

Whether it was right for Jacob to leave in the manner he chose is not recorded, but he clearly did not trust Laban and left without telling him. He first speaks to Rachel and Leah and they seem to have the same frustrated attitude as Jacob showed later. Yet they seem to have the same mercenary and selfish spirit as their father.

Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money. 16 For all these riches which God has taken from our father are really ours and our children's; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it." Gen. 31:14-16

The one bitter note that brought great sorrow later to Israel was Rachel's idolatry that may have later infected the nation. "Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's" (Gen 31:19).

And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods... 14 "Now therefore, fear the Lord, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord! 15 And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'" Josh. 24:2 14-15

Although it might have turned out otherwise, God appeared to Laban and warned him not to touch Jacob.

Laban's anger then settled on the stolen gods. But Rachel's guile and deception kept Laban from finding them, in the meanwhile, Jacob's anger boiled over and he chided Laban for his mistreatment (Gen. 31:36-41).

Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night." Gen. 31:42

Laban is thwarted and decides the best he can do is make a covenant with Jacob and left.

Esau and Jacob Reunited in Peace(Gen 32-33)

Jacob sends a message, probably hoping that 20 years would be enough to cool his brother's anger, but after learning that Esau is coming with four hundred men to meet him, fears the worst and even God's promises are not enough, as he takes matters into his own hands by dividing up his family from least to most favored, which had to hurt and may have later been another reason for the brothers extreme dislike of Joseph.

As he awaits the coming of Esau the event that changed his name to Israel occurred. How this matter of wrestling began is left silent, but Jacob knows this "man" had the power to bless him and he would not let him go until he did so.

Jacob then meets Esau and the reunion is a happy one. Although Esau wants to help Jacob travel the remaining part of the journey, Jacob refused and they parted friends. After returning, Jacob chose to purchase some land and dwelt in what would later be called Shechem.